

# Sewing for a Cause: Implementing and Evaluating Service-Learning in a Clothing Construction Course

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*The purpose of this exploratory investigation is to examine the use of a pedagogical framework to guide the development of a successful service-learning project within a technical program (clothing construction) as determined by increased student engagement and qualitative feedback. This investigation uses student reflection comparisons to assess the rollout of a service-learning theoretical framework, which was set up in two stages over multiple years. Stage One (pilot) investigated student and faculty reflections of community engagement after completing a community service project for an organization, but without direct interpersonal contact or reciprocity (mutual exchange and benefit) of learning. Stage Two (implementation) investigated student and faculty reflections of community engagement after completing the same activity as a service-learning course developed with a community partner, which provided direct interaction and learning reciprocity (mutual exchange and benefit) between students and affected populations. Through the comparison of student reflections from both stages, results indicate both learning and community engagement are present during the initial stage, which had no direct contact with a community partner. However, reflections from the second stage demonstrate a deeper connection and feeling of engagement with the service aspect during the full-immersion service-learning project.*

*Keywords:* service-learning, clothing construction, apparel, engagement

## **Introduction**

A significant trend in pedagogy and learning theory focuses on the incorporation of service-learning in higher education. It is only recently that the use of service-learning has been considered and become more widely applied in apparel specific courses, such as clothing construction. The increased use of service-learning in apparel courses is due to the application of content regarding client relationship skills, learning outcomes in a complex problem-solving setting, and project deadline/completion protocols similar to those experienced in the industry. Traditional teaching styles and methodologies are making way for more socially responsible curricula, putting the student into the context of a global community. In addition to a commitment for more socially responsible graduates, service-learning creates an environment for various learning styles to succeed while developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Ehrlich, 2005; Zlotkowski, 1999).

There are several factors which directly impact this study. The concept of service-learning in apparel design becomes challenging due to the narrow scope of student skill sets and the limited number of regional community organizations with the need for support from apparel-specific university courses and students. Implementing a complete service-learning course faces additional challenges, including time and resources. There exists a gap in the literature examining service-learning projects within technical programs, which presents practitioners with circumstances not documented in prior research. Research is also lacking on the use of progressive stages for im-

plementing service-learning. Classification of service-learning as reported in the various literature remains limited to a dichotomous system based on satisfaction of criteria (Zollinger, Guerin, Hadjiyanni, & Martin, 2009). In this study, the researchers propose that service-learning is not a dichotomous classification, but exists on a continuum where engagement can be implemented in stages. Therefore, the purpose of this investigation is to use student reflection comparisons in assessing the rollout of a service-learning theoretical framework applied to a technical course in two stages over several years. Stage One (pilot) investigated student and faculty reflections of community engagement after completing a community service project for a partner while working only in the classroom, with no contact or direct reciprocity of learning. Stage Two (implementation) investigated student and faculty reflections of community engagement after completing a service-learning project developed with a community partner, which provided direct interaction and learning reciprocity between students and affected populations.

### **Service-Learning**

Service-learning has many definitions. Objectives and learning outcomes distinguish it from other aspects of social responsibility, such as volunteerism or community service. A key part of service-learning definitions includes community needs and learning reflection, as outlined in Bringle and Hatcher's (1995) definition:

Course-based credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs, and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (p. 112)

From this definition, service-learning differentiates itself from volunteerism or community service by emphasizing course-based learning, academic principles, experiential opportunity, and reflection on the activity as well as the learning outcomes. Whether extension or academic faculty, the need to interpret and extend the knowledge-based theory for improving the lives and conditions of the communities we serve is a commonplace goal across many post-secondary institutions, especially those situated within the land-grant system. Ultimately, service-learning is distinguished by the link to course content and structured learning activities. A purposeful project design includes academic teaching and theoretical components combined with a jointly (community and academia) identified social issue. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills are developed through these connections and allow students to combine classroom work with community involvement.

### **Effects of Service-learning**

Service-learning virtues are often extolled in the literature, with few critical approaches. On the surface, the concept of combining academic learning with community service appears as a win-win situation. Through this combination, service-learning has been labeled as the "pedagogy of citizenship" (Mendel-Reyes, 1998, p. 34) or a teaching scholarship similar to methodological research (Howard, 1998). Overall, the major assumption is to promote the positive effects of

service-learning, often overlooking critical challenges despite the lack of evidence related to the impact of service-learning projects on the community partners (Eyler, 2002). Many of the lifelong learning behaviors instructors attempt to instill in their students in the classroom often do not come to life until students are in circumstances when they need them (Bay, 2006).

The benefits of service-learning for students have included increased critical thinking skills, a greater sense of civic mindedness, greater interpersonal skills, and higher levels of learning and thinking (Billig, 2000; Eyler, 2000). Combining the theoretical principles and practical applications with measurable and tangible results is often credited with increasing personal development in areas of self-confidence, self-esteem, self-knowledge, skills, spirituality, and personal motivation (Billig, 2000; Eyler, 2000, Kezar & Rhodes, 2001; Guglielmino, Long & Hiemstra, 2004; Mendel-Reyes, 1998). Other positive effects attributed to service-learning are enhanced communication skills, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making abilities (Kearney, 2004; Rama, Ravenscroft, Wolcott & Zlotkowski, 2000). Studies are inconclusive regarding the benefits to intellectual capabilities, but the findings remain supportive of critical and analytical thinking skills, problem-solving ability, and leadership skills (Eyler, 2000; Kearney, 2004; Steffes, 2004). One of the more clear benefits of incorporating service-learning curricula relates to many university mission statements now focusing on community engagement and outreach.

### **Challenges and Difficulties with Service-Learning**

Despite the benefits cited in the literature about service-learning, there exist challenges and difficulties related to its practice. Researchers have identified three main obstacles to implementing service-learning into a curriculum (Heffernan, 2001; Peters, McHugh, & Sendall, 2006). The first is time and pressure of teaching load. Considerable class time is dedicated to preparing the student for the service-learning process, which may require faculty to have extensive coordination efforts with a service-learning center to ensure communication between the students and partner sites. In the case of unforeseen delays or the elimination of projects or sites, it is difficult to make adjustments quickly due to time shortage for semester-long projects.

The second obstacle is resistance from faculty to curriculum changes. Service-learning implementation involves curriculum reform, and the success of the program largely depends on the efforts of individual faculty. The nature of classroom work is comfortable and predictable. Service-learning is unpredictable; due to this, faculty may find service-learning uncomfortable. However, the unpredictable nature of service-learning increases critical thinking and problem solving in students and faculty (Heffernan, 2001).

A third obstacle is the lack of support for faculty at the institutional level; sustained service-learning is synonymous with institutionalization (Furco & Billig, 2002; Tierney, 1997). The value campus administrators place on service-learning may positively or negatively impact the value faculty place on service-learning (Hinck & Brandell, 2000). In institutions with limited support and resources for service-learning, faculty members are discouraged from investing in service-learning development, despite the value it contributes to the overall university missions of teaching, research, and service (Hannan & Silver, 2000; Lambright & Alden, 2012; Tierney, 1997).

## Service-Learning Theoretical Framework

Zollinger and colleagues (2009) developed a framework based on Problem-Based Service-Learning and Community-Based Action Research models (Heffernan, 2001). The framework consists of four criteria that embody service-learning projects. First, the service-learning project should relate to course objectives; this attribute distinguishes service-learning from volunteerism. In planning stages of a service-learning project, the goals must support the learning objectives of the specific course. The second criterion is to apply course knowledge. Therefore, service-learning should have an application element, dependent upon the knowledge and ability of students to synthesize related course material into solutions for a real-life need. The third criterion connects to the community and fulfills both service-learning as defined, and possible university goals for community outreach and extension. Service-learning pedagogies develop collaborations between community organizations and academic institutions. The last criterion indicates that participants engaged in service-learning should reflect on learning outcomes as well as the effects it has on the community.

### Technical Program and Project Description

*Apparel Design I (ADI)* is an introductory clothing construction course taught to freshman/sophomore level students of both merchandising and design concentrations at a southeastern university. Skill levels range from novice to expert, based upon previous training or involvement with clothing construction. Course objectives relate to the technical construction of garments.

There are several models for service-learning. For the purpose of this investigation, we used a problem-based learning model, which presumes that the students will have some knowledge they can draw upon to make recommendations to the community or develop a solution to a problem (Heffernan, 2001). There were 142 undergraduate students enrolled in *Apparel Design I* who participated in this project. All of the participants were undergraduate students majoring or minoring in fashion design and merchandising. Participants were 18-24 years old and predominantly female. The first part of the service-learning theoretical framework rollout (Stage One,  $n = 77$ ) took place over three semesters with two course sections and course enrollment varying from 15-20 students. The second part of the service-learning theoretical framework rollout (Stage Two,  $n = 68$ ) took place over three semesters with one section per semester and course enrollment varying from 15-20 students. Variations in enrollment and participation at different stages resulted in a reduction in the number of students in the course and reduction in course sections. Following project completion, participants were given an open-ended response survey to gauge their experience with service-learning. This survey asked students to reflect on the learning experience and write a few sentences on their personal perception of the project. Students had two days to complete the reflection/response exercise. No additional guidelines for the open-ended response question were given, and responses ranged from a single sentence to multiple pages.

In all the courses taught, participants used Simplicity pattern (#2001) to keep consistency in grading related to the course objectives; however, selections from the design variations offered within this pattern style were available. Students selected a pattern from a choice of five different designs. Each student selected and purchased cotton woven fabric in a print of his or her choice. Participants were free to select or purchase embellishments or trims for their garment. Garment construction occurred over a three-week period, during a regularly scheduled class time. Projects

were academically evaluated on the construction quality and execution, based on a scoring rubric. Grading criteria focused solely on quality of construction and not on the service-learning component of the activity. In Stage One (pilot phase), the instructor designed the project and matched a community partner to the course needs. The course was then revised to meet principles of reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships in the full implementation stage. This study outlines the methods used and results obtained in both instances (pilot and full implementation).

### **Stage One (Pilot)**

A service-learning course objective was not initially implemented during the pilot because it did not follow traditional models of service-learning. Researchers developed a midterm project based on the framework developed by Zollinger et al. (2009). Initially, the project was designed based on course objectives for *Apparel Design I*, without considering service-learning components. Contrary to the community needs identification of earlier service-learning research, the Zollinger et al. (2009) framework guided this project without the immediate feedback of a community partner. Creating a project and selecting a community partner based on course objectives and project requirements (as opposed to tailoring projects to community partner needs) provided a first step toward incorporating service-learning into courses and curriculum. This is not the ideal approach for developing and promoting traditional service-learning. However, it is a small step for allowing educators to implement service-learning immediately and with little outreach efforts.

**Community engagement.** Before reaching out to a community partner, the instructor used prior evaluation criteria and timetables for *ADI* to design the project, keeping it within original course objectives. Following this part of course development, faculty searched for community organizations that were relevant to the project, regardless of geographical limits. The instructor decided to partner with Little Dresses for Africa (LDFA). Instructors reached out to the Executive Director of LDFA and presented the project as designed to meet course objectives without direct student interaction.

In partnering with LDFA, a nonprofit organization committed to sending relief to children of Central Africa, students sewed dresses for distribution through LDFA and orphanages located across the African continent. Due to the unorthodox relationship between instructors and community partners, there were no common goals or a shared vision, nor did students benefit from the reciprocity (mutual exchange and benefit) of learning, because they did not have contact with the community partner. LDFA provided informational materials for the students as well as a video about their mission and its positive effects. Students viewed the promotional and informational video in class, discussed the need for clothing options for these particular orphans, and reflected on the potential impact their garment would have on the life of a child. The course instructor (a native of Kenya) was able to give a primary source account of the current dress and clothing needs in impoverished areas of Malawi and Nigeria, and discussed the current living conditions and the social expectations of clothing in those parts of Africa. This instructor also answered any additional questions the students may have had about the project.

**Reflection.** Students and faculty completed open-ended reflections after the completion of the project. These reflections focused on the learning process, organizational needs, and an overall assessment of the service-learning experience and the project design. Following each semester, participants and faculty completed qualitative reflections, summarized in subsequent sections.

## Stage Two (Full Implementation)

Based on the results from Stage One, the course was modified to include service-learning as part of the course learning objectives for the full immersion stage. From Stage One to Stage Two, a new faculty member took over the course and worked with the previous faculty to develop and fully implement the service-learning theoretical framework into the course. For the second stage, class objectives were aligned with the four guiding principles of the university's Center for the Advancement of Service-Learning Excellence (CASLE): engagement, reflection, reciprocity, and public dissemination. The inclusion of these principles in the learning objectives designated the course as a service-learning option in the university's course catalog.

**Community engagement.** Based on recommendations from Extension agents, the instructors identified community partners. The first partner was Winston County Extension, in Louisville, MS. The county had faced a major tornado and engaging in this project was not only addressing learning objectives for the students but also serving as outreach to this community. Partners through Extension's 4H program identified seventeen 4H girls, who were typically from low-income homes and several from single-parent families in Winston County. The second partner was the Oktibbeha Extension 4H program, and an additional 17 4H girls from the general community were identified. As the nation's largest youth development organization, 4H works with Extension services at land-grant institutions to empower youth to make a difference in their community through participation in developmental activities and programming. Programming is typically geared towards these four tenants: health, head, heart, and hands. The third community partner was the Boys and Girls Club in Starkville. The youth involved were enrolled in a mentoring program within this Boys and Girls Club. Because two sections of the course occurred in the same semester, 34 girls were identified as participants from the Club. Prior to making the dresses, students met with the youth to learn about them, take measurements, and discuss the components of the dress with them. Students paired randomly with the youth from various backgrounds and socio-economic status. Based on the content addressed in class and the discussions with the youth, students choose the best design and fabric suitable to meet the needs of the girls. While sewing the dresses, students gained a deeper understanding of the cloth construction, reinforcing or expanding what students had learned during class lectures and activities, which achieved course objectives. Representatives from each community organization visited the class, giving presentations and holding discussions about their organizations and their needs. Students, in turn, visited the various organizations during the semester. They became more deeply engaged with the project, often meeting outside of class and off-campus. Additionally, students held workshops (sewing pillows) to teach the youth sewing construction skills outside of regularly scheduled class time. For the final activity, students coordinated with community partners and the girls to stage a fashion show for the families and the community. During the fashion show, each youth model presented what they learned from the project to the audience.

**Reflection.** Similar to Stage One, students and faculty completed open-ended reflections after the completion of the project. These reflections focused on the learning process, organizational needs, and an overall assessment of the service-learning experience and the project design.

**Reciprocity.** The community partners provided informational materials about their work to the students through presentations, discussions, and brochures, as well as pictures and videos about their mission before the project and after the project, to demonstrate the impact of the students' service-learning project on the community members. Students took pictures or created videos reflecting on the design process (e.g. fabric and design selection) and then shared the images/videos

with the community partners. The site visits by both parties also served as learning and teaching platforms. The dialogue created through these interactions has branched out into other areas of research and service. The created projects also served to reinforce the skills attained; students saw how their garments created impact and met real needs.

## Results

### Student Reflections Stage One

Based on qualitative responses from participants in the pilot phase, two overall themes became clear: (1) responses with a focus on the social benefits and altruistic nature of the overall project with little mention of the procedural details, and (2) responses with a critical reflection of the construction and procedural details of the project. All of the responses indicated the difficulty of the project; however, the end-use of the garment was the single most influential motivator for successful completion of the project. Many of the responses expressed a desire to connect with the person receiving the dress and/or see their expressions when the child first received the garment.

Responses under the first theme typically expressed a higher wish to connect with the individual recipient, as shown by the following quotes: “I only wish I could someday meet the future little girl who would one day get my little dress for her own,” and “I wish we could get pictures of their facial expression when they receive the dresses, which would be priceless.”

Responses under this theme indicated a strong inclination to continue using these and other skills to become more involved in community engagement, with mention of the importance and benefit of this type of activity in the classroom. When participants mentioned procedural details, especially difficulties and challenges, they were often followed by reflection on the end-use of the garment and the little girls receiving the dresses. For instance, one student responded, “Whenever I would get frustrated or impatient, I would imagine the young girl and how excited she would be to receive a dress unlike any other that her friends might have . . .” Overall, comments and responses classified under the first theme indicated reflection and connectivity of the participants to the project and the people set to receive the benefits of their community engagement.

Responses categorized under the second theme reflected on the skill and the learning process of the project as compared to the service component. Many of the comments focused on the difficulty of the pattern and/or construction techniques used. Disclaimers citing novice sewing ability often accompanied comments about difficulty of skill level. For instance, one student reflected, “I have never sewed before the class and was enjoying the challenge of the samples that we were doing and was ready to take on an even bigger project.” Another student stated,

I have learned how to sew for the first time in this class. I had never put together a piece of clothing until I made the dress . . . I had a very hard time making the collar and a few other things set me back.

Other responses that did not mention sewing ability often referenced the difficulty of the pattern and the risk of mistakes. Many of these comments were reflective of the challenges of the skill process required to complete the task:

The most trouble I had was with the collar or band that went along the neck. At

first, I put it on wrong. It took me about half an hour to undo it. But that has been the most frustrating part.

Responses to the open-ended question generated information to highlight two existing themes in the project in terms of the last stage of the Zollinger et al. (2009) framework: reflection. Participants reflected on either the altruistic nature of the project and the individual contributions, or on the skills learned and applied as part of the course content. However, results are inconclusive as to the level of technical skill growth directly related to the service-learning component of the course in comparison to a nonservice-learning course. Results indicate similarities to the quantitative data analysis of pre- and post-surveys of appreciation for the project and resulting effects.

### **Faculty Reflections Stage One**

Faculty reflections were similar to those of the students for Stage One. By keeping the focus of the service-learning project on the pre-established course objectives and earlier project guidelines, there was little added time or curricular change required. In addition, due to the increased focus on service-learning for this particular institution, the faculty received additional support for increasing service-learning engagement through this project. Based on in-class perceptions and conversations, the students appeared more invested in the successful completion of the garment when compared to similar projects in the class. According to faculty perception, the higher level of attention to detail, the willingness to identify and correct mistakes throughout the process, and the increased time commitments outside of the scheduled class were hallmarks of the students' work during this project. The student reflections mentioned above indicate similar results. Student feedback to the faculty during class time communicated disappointment in not having a direct connection to the child who would receive their garment. While the altruistic component of this project increased intrinsic motivation, the inability to see the service through to the end-user was a negative element for many of the students.

Overall, the approach of seeking a community partner based on the pre-established course curriculum does not necessarily fit into the traditional, established, and effective models of service-learning. The lack of reciprocity between the students and the community partner made this project more community service in a classroom than true service-learning. However, by introducing service-learning through this method, the faculty did not experience many of the commonly aforementioned challenges to developing service-learning. One of the major challenges alleviated was the time commitment to developing and managing a direct relationship with a community partner. Additionally, little to no additional resources were required to implement the project. Throughout the semesters, the project slowly developed more of a service-learning aspect, rather than just community service, giving the faculty the time to lead the way for modifying the course content in small calculated stages, as opposed to a complete course overhaul to incorporate service-learning. This evolution took place through the increased emphasis on the theoretical stages of service-learning within the course teaching. As the project became more aligned with traditional service-learning, the faculty decided to engage in the second stage of full service-learning immersion.



## Student Reflections Stage Two

Based on qualitative responses from participants in this stage, four overall themes became clear: (1) reflection of class content to the construction and procedural details of the project, (2) altruistic nature of the project, (3) distinction between community service and service-learning, and (4) connection with each other as they worked together as a team to make sure the culmination of the project with a fashion show was a success. Another theme that connected the four was the element of fun. Students indicated that even though the project was challenging, their responses to the open-ended questions were more insightful and detailed in comparison to Stage One. Reflections also indicated students had more fun when directly connecting with a community partner.

The first theme reflected the challenge of the projects as students indicated being overwhelmed by construction and procedural details. However, this did not deter them but motivated them to do their very best. Responses in this theme indicated the overall effectiveness of the project in achieving class objectives, as evidenced by the following quote:

Our course content linked perfectly with our service learning. Everything we had learned was completely relevant to our final task at hand. I am so proud of myself for completing my work and making it through successfully. Even though we have struggled massively while crunching well-constructed dresses, most of us would agree that it truly has been a fun way to learn. In addition to helping us learn to sew, the service aspect of this project has been a learning experience in itself.

The second theme that emerged was the altruistic nature of the project. Students committed to completing the garment successfully; they wanted their 4H girls to walk down the runway with a smile because they loved their dresses. The following quote is indication of their commitment:

This service-learning project has meant so much more to me than just working with the 4H girls to make them a dress that they all hopefully benefited from, but it has allowed me the chance to build a relationship with (name of the girl) and hopefully I have had a positive influence on her life. If it were not for this service-learning project, I would not have had the opportunity to build this relationship. I plan to keep in touch with her and have outings with her while I am in Starkville for graduate school. In addition, I plan on working with the Extension office this summer to have more experiences such as this one with the 4H girls.

The third theme clearly indicated that students had an understanding that service-learning is not community service, as evidenced in the quotes that follow:

Previously when I have done community service projects, they were very impersonal and quick. It was never a big learning experience for me. This service-learning project was completely different. It was one of the most rewarding things that I have done in college thus far. Not only did we have to sew a dress entirely by ourselves, but we got the opportunity to fit it and see the girls wear our designs. It was an incredible feeling to give my little girl her dress and see her face light up

when she put it on. It made me realize that I not only accomplished a goal in my academics, but I also really got to help someone.

I have participated in several community service projects and have logged well over 200 community service hours since I was in the seventh grade, but I never have participated in anything like the Service-Learning project with the dresses. Unlike many of the other community service projects I've done, working with this program has been a learning experience for more than just one day.

The fourth and final theme was building connections with each other as they worked together as a team to make sure the project finale, a fashion show, was a success. One student commented:

Beyond the classroom, service-learners are more attached to and involved in their communities. This service-learning project promoted teamwork, developed better communication, and coordination efforts. This also nurtured our leadership abilities.

Overall, most students concluded their reflections stating that they hope to have more classes with service-learning components, as evidenced in the reflections below:

I definitely enjoyed this service-learning project and definitely look forward to doing more in the future. I believe that this is a great concept of learning with giving back to the community and that every course should have some type of service-learning to apply to those courses.

It has been an incredible journey full of tears of frustration and joy, moments where only a high five from my instructor made me know I was doing something right and being proud of my final projects. I am excited to know I made it, and I cannot wait for many more opportunities like this!

### **Faculty Reflections Stage Two**

Implementing service-learning is challenging in light of issues such as student demographics and pressure from existing curricular goals; however, the rewards are numerous. Student reflections mirror faculty reflections. This project was especially designed to combine reflection with structured participation in projects in order to achieve specific learning objectives. As evidenced through their reflections, students gained a richer mastery of course content, enhanced their sense of civic responsibility, and ultimately developed a more integrated approach to understanding the relationship between theory, practice, ideas, values, and community in comparison to the responses received in Stage One. As the literature indicated, the time commitment and unknown dynamics of the community partners presented major challenges for service-learning implementation. However, many of the anticipated barriers did not present a major hindrance due to the transitional nature of the service-learning framework rollout. By systematically introducing and increasing the emphasis on the various components of the theoretical framework, the course slowly evolved to successfully incorporate service-learning. Although this evolution still encountered many of the

hindrances cited in the literature, the faculty dealt with challenges gradually as opposed to all at once. Therefore, limitations and effects on other faculty commitments were minimal. The benefits for teaching evaluations, instructional motivation, and research opportunities outweighed the challenges.

### **Assessment of Theoretical Framework**

This study investigated the use of the theoretical framework proposed by Zollinger et al. (2009) to develop a service-learning project, specific to course objectives implemented in two stages. Following the framework in the planning stages of service-learning created a project focused on course objectives with a measurable learning component and allowed faculty to phase in service-learning. In Stage One, course materials exposed participants to the growing demand and need for clothing in African orphanages. Students experienced first-hand how their commitment and work can address an identified need and make a positive impact in someone's life.

As evidenced by the open-ended response data, students revealed important technical aspects of the project, outside of altruistic influences. Results from this stage suggest initially using community-based course projects to incorporate service-learning based on measurable course objectives. If an actively participating community partner is not immediately available, that should not hinder the redesign of the course to incorporate service-learning. Project modifications occur until an active community partner is identified and selected. While this approach was successful for Stage One of this particular project, the consistent desire from participants to see the little girls' faces when they received the dresses hindered the altruistic goals of this project. By depriving Stage One participants of partner interaction, this focus on the micro-effects of their work is counter to many best practices related to service-learning, and it prevents participants from contextualizing their contribution on a larger scale. This approach to self-gratification further neglects the four major cornerstones of service-learning: reflection, reciprocity, community engagement, and public dissemination. Therefore, as the project evolved into Stage Two, participants reflected on their role of making a difference in the community, as opposed to seeking personal gratification as the result of their work. Additionally, without constant communication with a community partner throughout the process, it is difficult to relay the gravity and importance of community need through second-hand materials and personalized feedback from the partner. Lastly, participants (students and community) are denied the learning reciprocity (mutual exchange and benefit), evident in responses from Stage Two. In working with Extension, faculty connected with community needs based on direct feedback from agents working and living in the communities they serve. Extension services can give valuable resources to faculty wanting to find community partners and implement service-learning by removing the challenges of directly connecting with diverse communities. In follow-up, Extension agents have served as a catalyst for many of the students to continue mentoring the youth they connected with during the project.

Many times, students involved in fashion (design or merchandising) do not completely realize the impact clothing has on the world. Clothing is a basic human need and it takes skill, critical thinking, and time to create each piece of clothing. Putting this into a perspective the students can understand how they can apply course knowledge and objectives to service opportunities. Alterations and complexities were introduced, and while the projects contained a set of instructions (visual and written), this garment was the first-ever piece completed by a majority (+90%) of the students. In both stages, the challenge of creating a garment combined with the external and internal "pressure" to do a good job for the children provided a real-life connection to classwork.

Students were able to personalize the project and invest emotionally in the technical aspects of the project. Application of course knowledge to a social issue increased the student perceptions about overall university contributions to their learning and training. As one student wrote, “. . . I’m just glad we are using what we learned for something good and not just another project gathering dust in my closet.”

The open-ended responses from students in Stage One identified the emotional disconnect between the designer and the recipients of the garments. Despite students feeling connected to a larger global altruism, they had no way of knowing who would get their project, and they missed the personal connection. This challenge was addressed in Stage Two. Through personal interaction, students were able to tie the technical aspects of the project as well as the quality of the finished product to their connection with the girls. They could see the first-hand effect of their work, and thus observed the reciprocity of learning. Through this personal interaction, students were able to connect emotionally with the girls and feel like a member of their direct community. Reflection results from Stage Two have a higher rate of community involvement statements and personal roles within a larger community context as opposed to Stage One. This is also supported by the level of extracurricular commitments to plan and execute a fashion show for the dress recipients, the families, their friends, and the community partners for all three projects (two 4-H clubs, and the Boys and Girls Club).

In implementing the Zollinger et al. (2009) service-learning framework during Stage One, the first three steps provided a rich opportunity for students to reflect on the importance of their learning experience, further increasing motivation, appreciation, and participation perceptions. By allowing students to reflect on the altruistic and technical aspects of the LDFA project, overall perceptions of the activity were more positive. Therefore, the last stage of the framework was critical to put the entire service-learning process into perspective. When compared with Stage One results, student reflection on learning when connected with a community partner in Stage Two increased the depth and connection of understandings. From the open-ended responses, two similar themes surfaced for both stages: reflection on the service-learning component and reflection on the course objectives component. Students reflected positively on the altruism and the service aspects, especially in Stage Two. With direct connection to the community, many of these reflections indicated intrinsic motivational factors to do quality work.

### **Implications and Limitations**

Showing early stage students (freshman and sophomore) the important role clothing plays in people’s lives, beyond models on the runways, provides them a foundation to use their learned craft and education to improve global conditions. With an increased emphasis on service-learning and overall community connectivity across universities, integrating service-learning and community-based activities into current course offerings is beneficial for all. The use of a framework focusing on course objectives provided educators in this specific situation the opportunity to initiate and develop a service-learning project through an evolutionary methodology, in stages, mitigating many of the major challenges faculty face when developing service-learning courses. Utilization of the Zollinger et al. (2009) framework enabled faculty to jump-start a service-learning program and culture in a course which previously had none, and allowed them to develop a full immersion service-learning experience through a planned stage-based process. Based on the findings and experience of the faculty in this project, a partnership/inclusionary approach better serves the com-

munity and student learning. Service-learning can be implemented in stages with the goal of full immersion after one or two years, as evidenced by this project.

The scope of this investigation was limited to a regional university and used a sample of convenience. Sample size and gender composition, the limited number of single-item measures, and lack of statistical support for instrument validity contribute to the constraints of a broader application of results. Future studies including multiple models of service-learning and community partnership investigations will continue to aid faculty in overcoming the challenges of service-learning program development.

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